

Reshuffling Ethnic Composition of Cities by Migration in Syria

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Abstract

It is argued that the Arab Spring increased the motivation for democracy and led to clashes between the regimes and the citizens. Nevertheless, this expectation turned into a Civil War in Syria in 2011, causing the destruction of cities and displacing nearly half of the population. After the civil war, which started in 2011, there have been major ethnic shifts in Syria. Some Sunni Arabs, Kurds, Turkomans, Nusayris and Christian people, minorities in their areas, are forced to leave their homes. So the ethnic composition of the country is changed. This article draws attention to a potential crisis in the Middle East due to large shifts in ethnic populations. The Arab Spring and civil war in Syria triggered a process of federalisation in Syria as ethnic composition of cities and governorates shifted by forced migrations. IDP mobility in Syria is viewed from the perspective of Assad's "Useful Syria" doctrine and the ethnic structure that is tried to be created within the framework of the safe de-escalation zones created in the Astana process.

Keywords: Syria; Arab Spring; Forced Migration; IDP; Sykes Picot; Federal State of Syria

Introduction

The urban destruction caused by the Syrian Civil War resulted from a democratic deficit by the Baath Regime under the reign of the Assad family. The ethnic and cultural segments of the population and political opposition in Syria have been denied representation. The rule of law in a democratic constitutional order has been absent in a closed regime by the Assad family. Baath (resurrection), one of the political movements that left its mark on the last century of the Middle East, emerged as a nationalist (Arab nationalism) reaction against the exploitation order of the imperialist countries. Baath was founded in 1943 by a group of Syrian Arab intellectuals, most of whom were educated in the West, under the leadership of Orthodox Christian Michel Aflaq and Saladin Bitar, and became a party in 1944. The Baath Party, which has been in power for 35 years in Iraq from 1968 to 2003 and for 60 years in Syria since 1963, deeply affected the Middle East in the second half of the twentieth century and the first quarter of the twenty-first century. It has been ruled by the Assad family since 1971. The Baath Party, which set out to be a mass party, attracted the attention of minorities more because of its principles of social equality and secularism. Ba'ath leaders redefined Arab nationalism, which was previously monopolised by urban and Sunni Arabs, on a secular basis, and transformed it into a Western-style ideology, thus creating a regime based on minorities. The Baath Party, which pushed Islam into the background, continued to see Islam as an integral part of Arab national culture due to its central role in Arab history (Ataman, 2012: 15).

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On the other hand, demographics is a sensitive issue in Syria. Ba'ath ideology downplayed sub-national connections in favour of transnational identity; and even data on ethno-sectarian composition were not officially recorded (Matveeva, 2021: 142).³ This policy had certain effects based on pre-existing attitudes. Before the conflict, many Syrians believed that they lived in a socially cohesive society that highly accepted ethno-religious diversity and lifestyles, and was proud of their national identity and heritage. Ethnic, religious and cultural variety in the Middle East and Syria requires a more democratic approach if armed conflicts are to be avoided.

The Sykes-Picot Agreement (1916) is considered to be a major attempt by non-regional powers to redesign the Middle East. The erosion of the 100-year-old status quo paved the way for the Syrian Civil War. Shifting ethnic composition could be one instrument to achieve such a goal. In this article, human mobility patterns in cities are explored to assess emergence of an ethnic re-composition of cities in Syria.

Population Change in Cities During the Civil War

The Syrian Civil War has turned into a problem of survival, coexistence, protecting the region or clustering in the region where they can be safe for all ethnic-cultural groups living in Syria. For this reason, IDPs (internally displaced persons) mobility and international migration data indicate the efforts of ethnic and cultural groups to drive populations belonging to other groups away from their claimed territories while also attracting their co-ethnic fellow citizens to the areas under their control. Eventually, as many villages were destroyed during the civil war, rural areas sunk into poverty. IDPs arrived in the cities. Observing such mobility through urban population changes over the years is possible. There are 14 governorates (*Muhafazah in Arabic*) in Syria, and main city populations of some governorates are shown in Table 1 and changes during the civil war are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 1. Population Change in Selected Syrian Cities (1950 - 2020) (in thousands)

City	Years							
	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2010	2020
Aleppo	378	482	721	1,070	1,554	2,204	3,078	1,917
Damascus	414	580	914	1,376	1,691	2,017	2,401	2,392
Homs	102	159	251	387	565	856	1,341	1,336
Hama	90	153	192	241	309	495	925	922
De'ra	47	79	146	221	311	448	658	656
Ar-Raqqa	6	14	36	79	134	253	523	522
Lattakia	47	79	146	221	311	448	658	656
Tarous	8	15	29	49	101	208	426	424
Hasakeh	11	19	32	67	102	185	392	391
Deir-ez-Zor	26	42	66	89	123	191	325	323

Source: Prepared by the Authors Using the Data on <http://www.macrotrends.net>

³The estimates are that Sunni Arabs constitute around 70 percent of the population, and Alawi, Christian, Druze, Kurdish, Ismaeli and Shia forming the larger minorities.



Table 2. Population Change of Cities in the Syrian Civil War (2010- 2022) (in thousands)

	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Aleppo	3,078	2,045	1,358	903	600	979	1,600	1,675	1,754	1,834	1,917	2,004	2,098
Damascus	2,401	2,346	2,293	2,242	2,191	2,223	2,255	2,287	2,320	2,354	2,392	2,440	2,503
Homs	1,341	1,310	1,281	1,252	1,224	1,241	1,259	1,277	1,295	1,314	1,336	1,362	1,398
Hama	925	904	884	864	844	856	869	881	894	907	922	940	964
De'ra	658	643	629	615	601	609	618	627	636	645	656	669	686
Ar-Raqqa	523	512	500	489	478	485	492	499	506	513	522	532	546
Lattakia	658	643	629	615	601	609	618	627	636	645	656	669	686
Tarous	426	416	407	398	389	394	400	405	411	417	424	433	444
Hasakeh	392	384	375	366	358	363	368	374	379	385	391	399	409
Deir-ez-Zor	325	317	310	303	296	301	305	309	314	318	323	330	338

Source: Prepared by the Authors Using the Data on <http://www.macrotrends.net>

Since the beginning of the Syrian Civil War in 2010, the populations in these cities have seen an unstable decline. This mobility, which consists of three population strata (those who leave the cities, migrate to the cities and return to their cities), has turned into the general character of urban change in Syria (Zakaria, 2022).

Aleppo lost two-thirds of its population within 2 years from the start of the Civil War. Except for this city, all cities have reached a population higher than in 2010. The population loss of Aleppo between 2010 and 2022 is 32% (Stratejik Ortak, 2020).

In Table 1, Idlib data could not be used, appropriate data could not be found. On the other hand, the 2011 population of Idlib, which was about 2 million, decreased to 1 million with the civil war. With the region being the scene of intense conflicts, half of this population went to Turkey as temporary asylum seekers, while the other half had to go to camps and other cities in Syria. As the conflicts intensified around Hama, Quneitra, Deir ez-Zor, Raqqa, and Hasici, the IDP mobility started this time towards Idlib and the population of the city increased up to 3 million. Groups of 400-600 thousand of IDPs reached Idlib and migrated to Turkey. The rest started to live in inhumane conditions in the rural environment of Idlib and camp areas (Dalaman & Lehimler, 2021: 78).

Ethnic-Cultural Aggregation in IDP Mobility

The main reason for IDP mobility is the situation of encountering pressure that will eliminate the permanent or temporary residence conditions in the place of residence or migration. The violence used by the conflicting parties to seize the settlements at all stages of the Syrian Civil War caused the displacement of nearly 7 million people in the country at least once and their migration to another part of the country. It is stated that the majority of the refugees are Sunni Arabs. The fact that this population does not return to Syria means a radical change in the Syrian population structure (Tirkavi, Asi, & Alabdalla, 2022).

Table 3. Migration and Population Mobility in Syria (2010-2021)

Population Structure in Syria After the Civil War (2010-2021)	Person	%
Those who stayed in Syria	16,475,000	62
Those who went abroad	8,845,000	34
Dead / Missing	1,065,000	4
Total in 2021	26,385,000	100

Source: Jusoor B, 2021

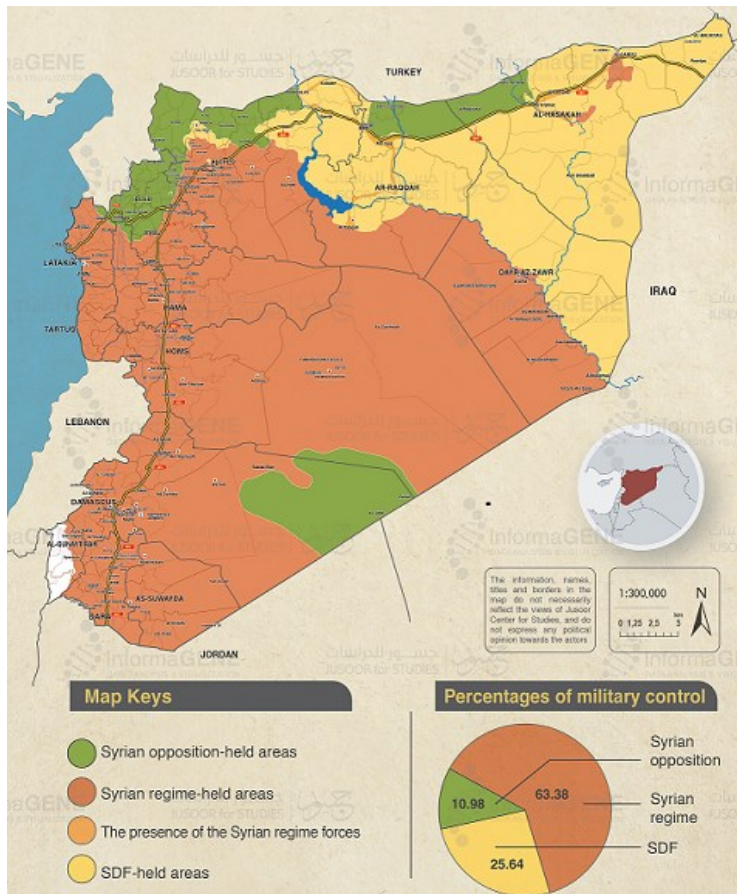
Syrian Civil War has brought about a change that can be considered devastating in terms of population. 4% of the population is dead or missing, and 34% has gone abroad. Of the remaining 16,475,000 people, 9,400,000 live under the control of the regime. The population living under regime control is 35.62% of the pre-Civil War population. It is 57% of the country's current total population. The civil war has resulted in the displacement or death of a third of the society under the rule of the Assad Regime.

Table 4. Distribution of Remaining Population in Syrian Territory During the Civil War

Population Structure in Syria After the Civil War	Person	Population Before Civil War (%)	2021 Population (%)
Population in Regime-Controlled Areas	9,400,000	35.6	57.1
Population in Opposition Areas	4,025,000	15.3	24.4
Population in the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) Controlled Areas	3,050,000	11.6	18.5
Total Population in Syria	16,475,000	62.4	100.0

Source: Jusoor B, 2021

Map 1. Control areas map of Syria, by the end of 2021 and beginning of 2022



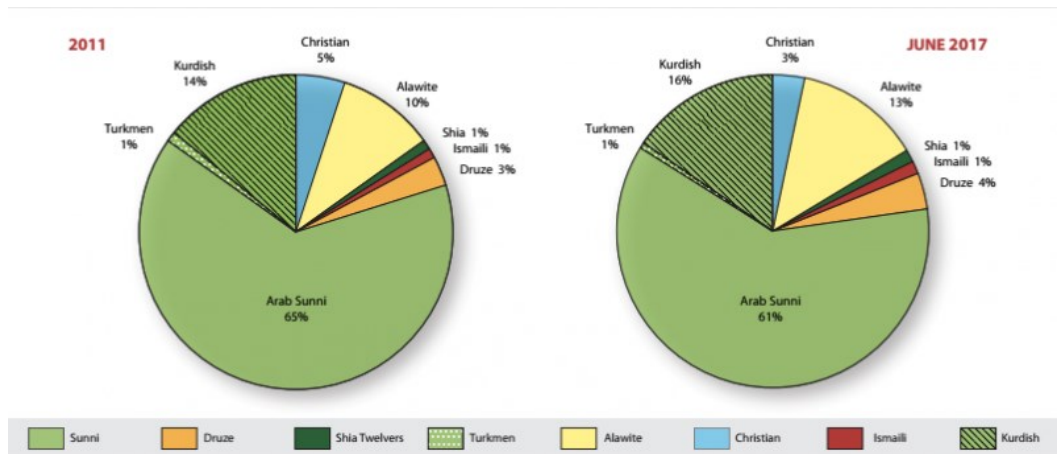
(Source: Jusoor A, 2021)



The opposition factions have control over (10.98%) of the Syrian geography, as the areas they hold are distributed in Idlib and northern Aleppo, in the Tal Abyad and Ras al-Ain areas, in Raqqa and al-Hasakah, and in the Zakaf and Al-Tanf area (55-km de-confliction zone) in southeastern Syria. The Assad regime has control over re-captured areas that come to (63.38%) of the Syrian geography, which encompasses the governorates of the coastal region of the country, central and southern Syria, and part of the eastern governorates and Aleppo. The Syrian Democratic Forces “SDF”, in contrast, control over with: (25.64%) of the Syrian geography. ISIS has no longer had any military control over the Syrian territory since February 2019. However, the end of the organisation’s military control does not negate the group cells’ resurgence to launch alleged attacks against the regime and its allies’ forces, the Russians and Iranians.

With conflict having uprooted 12.3 million people from their homes since 2011, displacement remains a hallmark of the Syrian crisis. In the past year the number of IDPs has increased from 6.1 million to 6.7 million – representing a third of the overall population (UNICEF, 2021). Poor economic conditions and the physical destruction of infrastructure are the main reasons for IDP mobility. However, there are actions that make it necessary to think that this movement is caused by the aim of changing the ethnic structure in a particular settlement. It is claimed that the Assad regime deliberately supported this IDP movement in Syria and that Iranians were given citizenship to increase regions’ Shiite population. The Washington-based Middle East Media Studies Institute (MEMRI) report claimed that Tehran is using the Syrian war to drive the region’s people out and replace them with Iranians claiming Iran’s desire to change the demographic structure of Syria. (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2018).

Figure 1. Infographic showing changes in Syria’s population distribution between 2011 and 2017.



Source: Balanche, 2018

In the context of ethnic-cultural elements, it is seen that the structure that the Sykes-Picot system could not resolve and delegated to the Syrian Civil War. Sunni Arab, Alawi Arab (Nusayri), Levantine (Christian Arab), Kurdish, Turkmen, Armenian, Yazidi, Druze, Jewish, Caferi Arab, Ismaili Arab, Sunni Caucasian (Chechen, Circassian), Ancient Ethnic Groups (Aramaic, Chaldean, Syriac) constitute the Syrian society. These communities are scattered almost like marbles over geographical area. The phenomenon of forced displacement in Syria

is not only the result of the Civil War, but is based on the strategies of the conflicting parties to change the ethnic-demographic structure in the regions they control (Lichtenheld, 2017).

The Political Orientation of Ethnic and Cultural Clustering in the Governorate of Idlib

Along with the civil war, ethnic and cultural elements have been clustered in certain settlements through IDP mobilisations and Syria has been divided into five. Controlled areas by Regime forces, SDG/YPG/PYD backed by Kurds, Free Syrian Army backed by Turkey, HTS (Hayat Tahrir al Sham) and other non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are divided into geographical areas disproportionate to the population.

Whether the general view of the division of the country will remain as it is, and the possibilities of eliminating the division and establishing unity in the country are discussed on the axis of the unitary structure. However, the subject of this study is that outside of the unitary structure axis, they either transform into independent states with their current status or they are divided within themselves. Moreover, these possibilities tend to occur simultaneously.

The region under the control of the Assad Regime is the “De Jure” Syrian Arab Republic. Structurally, the rapid urban development and increased social mobility of Alawi communities under the Assad’s (Hafez and Bashar) reign, has contributed to a better educated, wealthy, and politically influential class of Alawi citizens. Historically, many members of the community migrated from the marginalised Alawi stronghold in Syria’s largely agrarian coastal mountain region to the capital, Damascus, where they came to dominate the country’s ruling elite in the 1950’s and the 1960’s (Balanche, 2015: 80). On the other hand, during the civil war, the Sunni Arab population migrated from Idlib governorate abroad or to other parts of the country, and a relatively less segregated society emerged than before the Civil War.

With the migration of Kurds and Turkmens from the region, Alawite Arab, Assyrian-Chaldean, Armenian, and Circassian/Chechen groups were directed to gather in this region by the fear of Sunni Arab and ISIS activities (Hartman, Morse, & Weber, 2020). The invasion of ISIS in 2015 led to the escape of Sunni secular Arabs and minority groups to Regime-controlled areas in Deir ez-Zor. ISIS started its first attempt at ethnic cleansing and demographic change by resettling Sunni Arabs in the region, which it forced to migrate from Aleppo (Balanche, 2015).

The other possibility is that the existing regions are further differentiated within themselves. Moreover, the accumulation of the population in certain regions by taking into account ethnic-cultural characteristics through IDP mobilisations, and the legalisation of the current de facto situation, hinders its transformation into the status quo.

The change in the ethnic-cultural structure of the cities held by the actors providing geographical control in Syria helps to gain an opinion on clustering. Idlib was chosen as a model city in the study. Idlib province consists of Harem, Jisr al-Shughur, Idlib city centre, Ariha, Maarat El Numan settlements. Before the civil war, there were 130,000 people in the capital of the governorate, which had a population of around 700,000 in total. After 2018, Idlib governorate population reached 3,300,000 people. 1,200,000 of the IDP population live in camps (Özkızılıçık, 2018). Over half the population are children, and widowed women headed many households. There are many people from Aleppo, Eastern Ghouta, Homs or Daraa, areas that were handed over to government forces in surrender deals or military defeat



Before the civil war, it was accepted that the majority of the population belonged to the Shafi sect. The ethnically Arab local population was the scene of Salafism and Naqshism activities in the pre-Civil war political ground. Consequently, Idlib has turned into an area where the population of the IDP fleeing from other cities, especially Hama and Homs, has accumulated (Özkızılcık, 2018). Ethnic-cultural clustering is intense in Idlib. However, clustering is considered more of a cultural (sectarian) nature (McConnel, 2020).

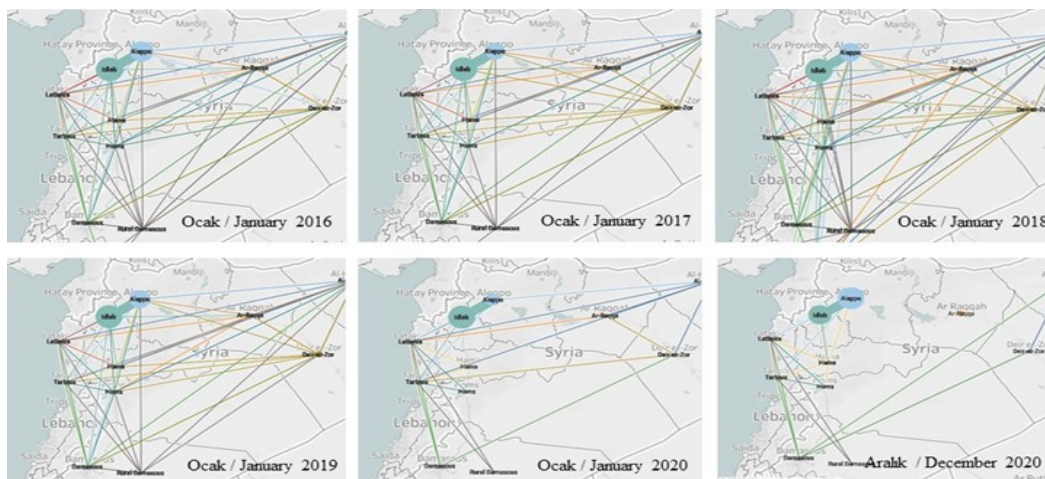
Idlib's ethnic-cultural disintegration process takes place more intensely than other cities and turns into an area of tension where Sunni ethnic elements are directed (Erkmen, 2021). In May 2017, as part of the Astana peace talks, Russia, Iran and Turkey agreed on the establishment of four so-called de-escalation zones in Syria. These zones were designed to be areas in which all hostilities should cease and in which civilians should be protected from attacks (Jaecke & Labude, 2020: 1). As a result, four de-escalation zones were established, in Eastern Ghouta, Homs, Daraa and Idlib – all opposition strongholds at the time. After the entry of government troops into Eastern Ghouta, Homs and Daraa, many additional fighters flocked to Idlib, including followers of radical Islamist militias. Today, only the Turkish-controlled de-escalation zone of Idlib still exists. According to estimates, there are now approximately 70,000 armed rebels in the area. The UN Security Council estimates that the Al-Qaida-associated Hurras al-Din has about 5,000 and the HTS militia 15,000 fighters in Idlib (UN Security Council, 2020). In addition, there are about 50,000 fighters from other rebel groups (Al-Wasl, 2020). The population has grown from 1.3 million to 3.5 million because of the influx of IDPs. Although the supply situation and living conditions in Idlib are extremely difficult after years of war and destruction, it is still the last refuge region for many people in Syria. As a result, a traumatic mass accumulation has emerged, which has no means of livelihood, lives in ruins or unhealthy tents, and whose health, education and security needs, especially nutrition, cannot be met (UNHCR Syria, 2021).

Intercity IDP Mobility in Syria

During the civil war, each governorate in Syria is both a source of migration and a place of destination. The intense mobility experienced indicates the destruction of the socio-cultural structure for ethnic-cultural identities as well as spatial-physical destruction. However, the fact that the city is livable for some population groups and unlivable for others requires leaving the city for some and immigrating to the city for others. It can be observed that IDP mobility started to decline starting from 2019, but the cities of Aleppo, Idlib and Hasakah continue to receive refugees from other cities (SACD, 2022).

According to the records of the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the number of people leaving the cities between 2016 and 2020 is 1,216,173. Looking at the IDP-Outgoing ratios in the total mobility of cities, it is seen that Aleppo decreased from 60.2% to 23.9%, and Idlib increased from 1.4% to 73.9%.

During the civil war, attacks were carried out that affected IDP mobility and required (according to the United Nations and civil organisations working in the field of human rights (Altuğ, 2021) perpetrators to be tried in international criminal courts (HRW, n.d.). The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights called for the prosecution of those who committed war crimes in Syria. These attacks caused certain ethnic-cultural groups to flee the settlement (EuroNews, 2021).

Map 2. IDP Mobility in Syria (2016-2020)

Source: OCHA, 2020

Table 5. Ratio of Aleppo and Idlib Cities Within IDP Mobility in Syria (%)

City	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Hasakeh	1,3	1,0	0,0	0,3	0,9
Aleppo	60,2	43,0	10,4	17,0	23,9
Ar-Raqqa	0,4	6,9	0,1	0,3	0,7
As-Sweida	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0
Damascus	0,7	1,0	0,0	0,4	0,1
Dar'a	15,4	0,4	0,1	0,0	0,1
Deir-ez-Zor	7,0	2,1	2,8	46,6	0,1
Hama	3,9	2,9	8,0	2,3	0,0
Homs	1,7	1,6	0,0	0,3	0,1
Idlib	1,4	2,6	77,1	31,2	73,9
Lattakia	0,8	0,1	0,0	1,1	0,2
Quneitra	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0
Rural Damascus	6,8	31,0	0,1	0,1	0,0
Tarous	0,0	0,1	0,0	0,5	0,1
Unknown	0,3	7,1	1,5	0,0	0,0
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Prepared by the Authors Using the OCHA Humanitarian Response data.

Accessed on: 1.1.2022, <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/operations/stima/idps-tracking>

“Autonomy”, “Independence” and “Federated State” Tendencies of Syrian Urban Governorates

The Syrian Civil War can be considered to have led to the dissolution of the heterogeneous structure that Sykes-Picot had frozen in Syria. Urban structures in which ethnic-cultural groups exist more or less in every city have begun to change, and a new ethnic-cultural identity specific to each city has begun to emerge. According to Denny and Walter, when political power is divided along ethnic lines, ruling elites can disproportionately favour their own ethnic group at the expense of others. This creates grievances that fall along ethnic (2014: 199). The rulers of the cities (governorate in Syria) are attempting “ethnic cleansing” and “forcibly changing the demographic structure” in line with their own ethnic-cultural preferences. This



situation, as well as the reason for migration, leads to the elimination of the return conditions of the immigrants. Another initiative that aggravates this process is the Syrian regime's invalidation of identity and other official documents, especially belonging to IDPs (UNHRC, 2021).

Three alternatives, which are considered to be suitable for this new situation of Syria in the international arena, are discussed as alternatives to the unitary Syrian State formula. The main advantage of those making these discussions is that nearly half of the country's population immigrated to countries including Turkey and evacuated their homeland.

Each of the actors who hold the cities in their hands, without accepting their responsibilities arising from their own actions that caused migration and destruction; It demands the recognition of the de facto ethnic-cultural population structures of the cities, their transformation into a protected status quo, and the creation of a political system that reflects this situation. Organisations that claim to make demands on behalf of Ethnic-Cultural Identities are non-state actors of the Syrian Civil War.

The Kurdish population, which is 7%-10% of the country's population, controls 35.6% of the country's lands in Northern and Eastern Syria, with Haseke being the center, by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDG) formed by the YPG/PYD. By using IDP mobility's, activities are carried out for the settlement of Kurds from other cities in the country and the migration of other ethnic-cultural elements to other cities. The first demands were made in 2014 (Kajjo, 2019), just after the success of operations against the ISIS invasion (Jongerden, 2018).

The Kurdish Democratic Union Party (PYD) and other Kurdish elements established autonomous administrations in Afrin, Kobane and Jazeera, which they called "cantons" (Kızılkaya, Hamdi, & Salman, 2021). Spokesperson Nawaf Khalil claimed that federalism is the solution for Syria and presented a statement to the Geneva Meeting hosted by the United Nations (BBC, 2016). These demands lead Kurdish organisational elements to more cooperation with extra-regional powers, primarily the USA and Russia (Saleh, 2021).

There are also many organisations and alternative political demands for Sunni Arabs. The general characteristic of the organisations that express demands for this segment is that they are numerous and that a significant portion of them, especially the big ones, embrace the Salafi-jihadist tradition (Zeyd, 2019). A large number of organisations that exclude the secular among Sunni Arabs and compete with other ethnic-cultural elements have carried out acts of violence against all segments that do not have their own views.

The political demands of these organisations are of two groups. Those who follow the tradition of al-Qaeda and ISIS demand the establishment of a Salafi Islamic State. The second group is the "Ikhwan" organisations, which are also supported by the countries of the region. The demands of those coming from the Ikhwān al-Muslimīn (Muslim Brotherhood) tradition, based in Egypt (Diyamet, n.d.), are to establish a state governed by the constitution prepared in accordance with the Sunni sharia.

Apart from groups acting on behalf of Kurdish and Sunni Arabs, organisations claiming to represent Shiite Arabs are among the active actors of the Syrian Civil War. Many Shiite organisations, especially the Lebanon-based Hezbollah supported by Iran (Elhan, 2019), became a party to the conflicts during the Syrian Civil War. It is claimed that organisations

that ideologically aim to export the Iranian Revolution are acting under the supervision of the Quds Force (Bilgetürk, 2018) deployed in the region by Iran (Alaca, 2019).

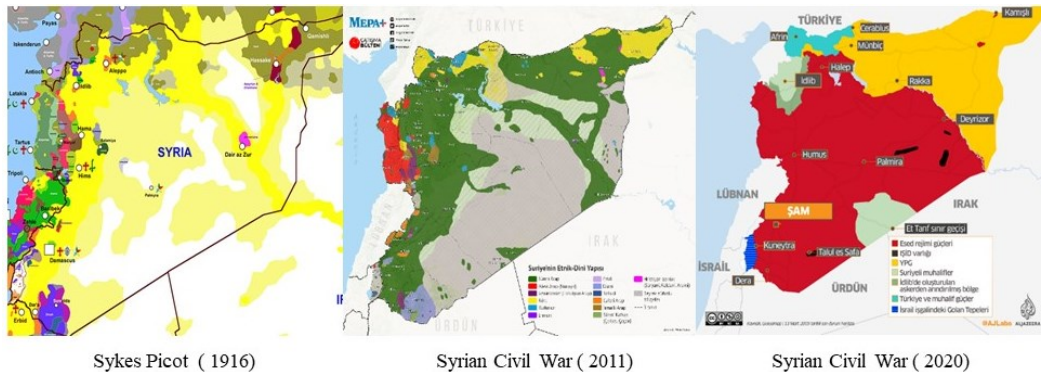
The organisations that established dominance in the cities by claiming ethnic-cultural belonging during the Syrian Civil War and the ethnic-cultural profile of the cities are shown in the table.

Table 6. Ethnic/cultural and Political Mobility in Syrian Governorates (March 2020), prepared by the Authors Using the OCHA Humanitarian Response data

	Arab	Shia Arab	Kurdish	Turkmen	Yazidi	Nusayri	Druze	Chechen	Syriac	Armenian		
Aleppo											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Idlib											Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS)	Sunni Arab Salafit
Damascus											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Homs											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Hama											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Dar'a											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Ar-Raqqa											People's Protection Units (YPG/PDY)	Kurdish T. Org.
Lattakia											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Tarous											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Hasakeh											People's Protection Units (YPG/PDY)	Kurdish T.Org.
Deir-ez-Zor											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
As-Sweida											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Quneitra											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri
Rural Damascus											Baath Regime / Syrian State	Arab / Nusayri

As can be seen in the table, the Syrian Civil War has almost stagnated since March 2020. A political distribution has emerged that does not reflect the ethnic-cultural profile of the cities. The first two maps indicate ethnic composition while the third one shows political-military control. It turns out that the political forces holding the governorates in the third map do not reflect the ethnic/cultural profile of the region.

Figure 9. Ethnic - Cultural Change in Syrian Governorates (1916 - 2011 - 2020)



First Map Accessed at Dr. Michael Izady
 Second Map at MEPA News B
 Third Map at MEPA News A



Conclusion

The events that started in 2011 with the influence of the Arab Spring, until 2015, opposition elements, their common enemies, carried out actions against the regime, and established many organisations. With its involvement in the Civil War in 2015, ISIS has become the sole adversary of the regime, extraterritorial forces and other parties to the Civil War. In the period between 2015-2018, all parties have made temporary cooperation among themselves for the organisation. However, after 2019, they started to develop different applications and demands in order to keep all their gains in this period.

Insisting on a unitary state at the beginning, Bashar Assad has developed the Useful Syria doctrine since 2016 and has negotiated with the PYD/YPG for this doctrine after 2019 (Qutrib, 2011). In order to reach new ethnic-cultural population profiles, almost all parties continue their acts of ethnic cleansing and physical destruction of cities, forcing unwanted population clusters to migrate to Idlib. No official consensus of the population in Syria exists from 2011 onward. There is a need to document the reality of the population indicators available after this date. In fact, we will see the final state of the ethnic distribution in Syria and to what extent the regime forces were able to achieve the demographic change they wanted to make during the civil war. There is a need to raise the issue of demographic change at international gatherings and to bring a lawsuit against the regime and its allies. Forced demographic change is a war crime from the standpoint of international law. The Iranian strategy of demographic change in Syria is clear. International community especially MENA countries, including their human rights institutions, must stand up to in all international forums to stop this case of playing with demographic structure for strategic purposes. Although it is the subject of another study, “dispossession” is also one of the most important consequences and causes of forced migration and IDP mobility. Action must be taken to stop the types of “dispossession” aimed at creating demographic change in Syria.

In the study, population mobility based on ethnic-cultural distinction is given intensively. The material/formal nature of these mobility’s shows that the Syrian Civil War has evolved and that a federal state has become one of the strongest options in its final phase. Mobility of ethnic groups, which may lead to demographic change in the form of IDP mobility, can be seen in the statistics, tables and graphics given in the study. When this process is completed, military pressures are expected again, which will cause the Arabs to flee to the north, the Kurds to the northeast, and the Shiites to the east.

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